

**FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM**

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## **NEWS FROM LAKSHMI ASHRAM SANCHAR 114**

March 2012

Dear friends,

This time the newsletter brings:

- The accounts of 2011
- “Strong Bonds of Friendship between Lakshmi Ashram and Otto-Hahn Gymnasium, Göttingen” by David Hopkins
- “Students from St. Catherine University visit Lakshmi Ashram” by David Schmit, Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, and Evan Gaydos, English student, St. Catherine University
- “Sadhana” Training Programme in Gandhian Thought 2011-12 by Sadhana Trainees

**We hold the yearly general meeting in Denmark on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2012 at 2 pm.**

Report of this meeting will be sent in the next Sanchar.

It still costs 1725 Danish kroner and the subscription 75 Danish kroner to be a sponsor (about 230 Euro and 10 Euro) = 1800 Danish kroner. Some people send money once a year for a sponsorship, and others divide the amount during the year. Therefore we will put 75 kroner into the administration account the first time of the year, when we receive money from someone. This also applies if you send amounts that are not earmarked. So all will pay the same amount a year to be a member and receive the Sanchar. I assume one membership per household, club, society etc., unless otherwise instructed. The surplus from the administration account will of course be sent to Lakshmi Ashram.

Thank you for all the money. Any amount of money will be received with pleasure. Contributions that are not earmarked are also very good. The money will be used for educational material, study tours, education of the teachers, etc. You can send money by a crossed cheque or by bank transfer – the IBAN account number can be seen on top of this letter.

The accounts for 2011 are attached. I hope that 2012 will be a good economic year for Lakshmi Ashram. We use so little money for administration, and the money is sent directly from our bank to the Ashram's bank in Kausani, so no money will be lost – only bank charges.

Friends of Lakshmi Ashram can save money, if some of you would be satisfied just to receive a mail telling that you can read the Sanchar in the homepage. If you want to get the message in a mail instead of receiving a letter, then please send me your e-mail address to: [lone-poulsen@comxnet.dk](mailto:lone-poulsen@comxnet.dk)  
Thanks to the members who have accepted this.

Best wishes,

Lone Poulsen

# FRIENDS OF LAKSHMI ASHRAM

## STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2011

### ORDINARY PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT

#### Income

Contributions received	115.848,51 DDK
Subscription: 73 members à 75 DDK	5.475,00 DDK
Interest and yield	78,23 DDK
<b>Total income</b>	<b>121.401,74 DDK</b>

#### Expenses

Administration	2.637,00 DDK
Paid to Lakshmi Ashram	106.617,87 DDK
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>109.254,87 DDK</b>

<b>Net result of ordinary account</b>	<b>12.146,87 DDK</b>
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### BALANCE SHEET at 31.12.2010

#### Assets

Danske Bank: Giro	975,82 DDK
Danske Bank: Danish Deposit	52.097,76 DDK
<b>Total bank deposits</b>	<b>53.073,58 DDK</b>

#### Liabilities

Ordinary net capital, beginning 2010	40.926,71 DDK
Net result	12.146,87 DDK
<b>Net capital, end 2010</b>	<b>53.073,58 DDK</b>

### SECONDARY PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT (the inheritance)

Net capital, beginning 2011	257.855,69 DDK
Net result 28.09.2011 – the account has been called in	1.622,02 DDK
	<b>*259.477,71 DDK</b>

\*The amount has been transferred to Lakshmi Ashram's in Kausani (259.287,71 DDK + 190 DDK for charge). LA has opened a special pension account for the amount.

Albertslund, 22.02.2012

The accounts have been audited.

Albertslund, 22.02.2012

Lone Poulsen

Claus Broskov Sørensen

## Strong Bonds of Friendship between Lakshmi Ashram and Otto-Hahn Gymnasium, Göttingen

By David Hopkins



It was towards the end of a very wet September in 2005 that I opened the Inbox to find an unexpected e-mail from a German school teacher, Winfried Wemmel. He had written:

*Dear Sir,*

*I got your e-mail-address from Lone. It is to ask if a group of 26 German teachers can visit your Ashram at 21st of October in the early afternoon. We are very interested to see your work and get information about your ideas and ideals. Normally I visit India with German students. Maybe it is possible that our girls and your students get in contact.*

*Thanks/Regards*

*Winfried Wemmel*

This brief e-mail was to be the beginning of a growing friendship between Lakshmi Ashram and the Otto-Hahn Gymnasium in Göttingen, which has continued flourish up to the present day. Winfried did indeed bring a group on 21 October that year. Our haymaking was going on but our workers and students took a break that afternoon and gave a warm welcome to Winfried's group in Shanti Bhavan.

Then the following autumn saw two former students of the Otto-Hahn Gymnasium, Janina Brosck and Sarah Constanzo, come for two months to Lakshmi Ashram as part of their gap year.

Then in the spring of 2007 we welcomed the first of four groups of students that have visited Lakshmi Ashram as part of their India Tour. The first two tours were led by Winfried himself, and in the second one he was accompanied by a young teacher, Bertram Tyron, who has since assumed responsibility subsequent to Winfried's retirement for leading the school parties.

The latest group from the Otto-Hahn Gymnasium visited Kausani from 19-22 October 2011. They had arrived the previous day in Almora, where they were introduced to the activities of Mahila Haat, and reached Kausani in the early afternoon. The group of seventeen students, mostly seventeen year olds in class twelve, immediately came up to the ashram along with their three teachers – Bertram, Daniel and Janet. Our two German volunteers, Lucy and Marie, showed them around and then I sat with the group telling them all about the ashram – its history and its present activities. The students had plenty of questions to ask and it was beginning to get dark by the time they left to return to their hotel.



The following morning they all arrived promptly at eight o'clock and joined in with our students in various activities. Some went off to the forest to look for firewood, some were collecting grass for the cattle, while others were working in the kitchen and cutting vegetables. Then at eleven o'clock everyone gathered in Shanti Bhavan. The visitors introduced themselves, and both our girls and the students from Gottingen sang songs. The German students then presented gifts that they had brought for the Ashram school. They joined us for a simple ashram lunch that they thoroughly enjoyed, and then had the opportunity to observe our classes before going down the hill to the hotel.

The second day we had planned a walk over the hills to Baijnath temple, but at seven o'clock that morning it became very dark, started to rain and there were two deafening claps of thunder. One flash of lightning put the Kausani internet service out of action until the following day! However by soon after eight o'clock the skies began to clear and we were able to enjoy the walk as planned. The students were very fit and enthusiastic, some striding far ahead as we climbed up out of Kausani towards the village of Naughar, from where the path drops gently down along a ridge, with fine views over the hills to the north. Unfortunately the Himalayan peaks were not visible but the early morning shower had cooled the air, making it pleasant for walking.

The group was to leave the following day at midday, but they were still keen to come up to the ashram to do a specific environment related project. There is an invasive plant, known locally as *kala bansa* that has spread within the ashram campus as well, so most of the German students, along with some of our students, spent two hours working hard uprooting this plant.

All in all it was a very successful visit, and Lakshmi Ashram is very grateful to the support that Otto-Hahn Gymnasium has extended to us over the past five years, raising funds for the Ashram to purchase much needed equipment, for example floor covering for the meeting hall and students' rooms. We hope that the close bonds between Lakshmi Ashram and Otto-Hahn Gymnasium will continue to flourish in the coming years.

## **Students from St. Catherine University visit Lakshmi Ashram**

By David Schmit, Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies,  
and Evan Gaydos, English student, St. Catherine University

St. Catherine University, in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA, is a leader in women's higher education. As part of the curriculum for a Bachelors degree, students are required to enroll in a seminar, entitled, "The Global Search for Justice." We examine the conditions of justice for people living outside European



and North American culture. Some versions of the course are actually taught in the country under study.

In the early summer of 2011, Director of Campus Ministry Laurie Svatek, and I brought eighteen students to India to study visionary Indians and Tibetans who have raised their voices and dedicated their lives to justice issues. Principal topics are the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi and study of the leaders of India's women's movement. We had the rare opportunity to travel to Kausani and visit Lakshmi Ashram, to learn about the stellar educational work being performed there. Our students benefitted immensely from the experience, immersing themselves in ashram life, interacting with the delightful students and teachers, and learning from David Hopkins, who facilitated our educational experience.



Along with our studies at the Ashram, one high point of the trip was a visit to a nearby village of Uttarauaura, in the Kumoan valley, where, with the assistance from students and workers associated with Lakshmi Ashram, residents had worked together to build a community center and advanced methods to improve crop cultivation. Afterwards, David Hopkins, led us on a hike through the village to a nearby picturesque Shiva Temple where we reflected on our India journey and ate lunch. It was a most memorable day! The following brief report is written by one of our student travelers, Evan Gaydos, a senior in English, who reflects on her Ashram experience. We are most grateful for the opportunity to visit Lakshmi Ashram, and look forward to doing so again!

David Schmit

This past summer, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to stretch my boundaries and step outside of both my culture and my comfort zone. Destination: India; duration: three weeks; design: my class on the Global Search for Justice at St. Catherine University.

Kausani and Lakshmi Ashram was the last leg of our Indian journey. We arrived on June 7, after an overnight train from New Delhi and a six hour bus ride up some treacherous looking mountain roads. We stayed for five days. After previously studying Gandhian principles at the Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi, we were able to see how life was led accordingly.

On our first day, we shared names and various songs and dance from our cultures with the Ashram girls. About six people from our group then began playing different hand games with the ever growing number of young residents from the Ashram. This eventually turned into an evening of sharing songs, hair braiding, and camera “borrowing.” The girls greatly enjoyed taking pictures with our cameras and some of them were actually quite good too. We stayed for evening prayers which were incredibly peaceful and an experience I am happy to remember.



Our second visit to the Ashram we helped with chores. Some students helped clear part of the forest while others helped clean the kitchen and prepare the afternoon meal. All of us had a wonderful time getting to know the girls better. Then, we shared lunch. With the help of Ashram residents proficient in English, we heard amazing stories from these young women.

On our last night at Lakshmi Ashram – with David Hopkins acting as translator – we stayed for evening prayers, after which we talked. We told the girls about where we were from – the state of Minnesota, in the USA. A few of the girls had written down their thank-you’s to us in English so they could read them aloud. I’m pretty sure it was at this point several of us started crying. We sang a few songs for the girls that were easy enough for everyone to join in on if they wanted. Then the girls sang some songs for us (we all joined in on “My Bonny Lies Over the Ocean”) and they showed us some traditional dances. When all was said and done I’m pretty sure we broke some bedtime rules. We didn’t want to leave the new friends we made. The girls walked us all the way to the gate with hugs and good-byes. I think we all left with a greater appreciation of the world’s community and what it is like to be a part of it. We had an amazing time.

Evan Gaydos





## “Sadhana” Training Programme in Gandhian Thought 2011-12

By Sadhana Trainees

Lakshmi Ashram in Kausani offers a course called ‘Gandhi Vichar Acharan Prashikshan’ or ‘Practical Training in Gandhian Thought’, that runs for eight months. Every year girls come from various parts of the Kumaun Hills to learn from it. This programme first began in 1997. We were nine girls on the 2011 course – Hema, Godavari, Nirmala, Megha, Uma, Rohita, Rekha, Gita and Durga. We came together in Lakshmi Ashram on 14 July, and were to live here for eight months. We participated in all the activities of Lakshmi Ashram, carrying each and every task with true sincerity and honesty.

The girls of the ashram are all skilled in each and every activity, and never give up in whatever they are doing. In our course we were to first learn to work with the same spirit as these girls – this was the starting point of our course. Besides our time working alongside the girls we had four hours of classes, in which during the first one or two months we learned to spin wool on the Bageshwari Charkha (*a locally produced spinning wheel*) and then, having mastered the art of spinning, we enthusiastically began to knit items from the yarn that we had spun, and we also learned to weave rugs.

Gandhi always believed in first practicing himself, and used to say that if we have the necessary means and resources then why should we not spin ourselves and make clothes to cover our bodies. People in the present day might not be able to understand this concept, however in our ashram it is practiced successfully.

Taking the course in Gandhian Thought is no easy task. Only if there is a sufficient spirit of renunciation and a strong inner personal commitment can an individual come to understand this thought. It is not everybody who has the capacity to understand Gandhi; however an ordinary person can nevertheless also do so. In pursuing these studies we have learned this much that within each and every individual living in this world is that power that can change the world. Gandhi would say that he would first practise himself, prove to himself, and only then tell others to do likewise.

In our training programme we read Gandhi’s autobiography, which helped us to get to know and understand Gandhi a little better. Before that while at school we had only learned of Gandhi’s birth and death. However now that we have read his autobiography we have learned how he was born as a very ordinary person, did not study in a really good school, and we have become acquainted with each and every turning point in his life that eventually led to him becoming a Mahatma – all this we have read and come to understand.

At first we were not very motivated to learn, for we were habituated to the manner of teaching in school. However when we came to understand this subject and something was awakened within us, then we came to see the way ahead. This was shown in our group of nine girls, all living together in one room, in the way we would share together the smallest to the biggest issues, and make efforts to illuminate our discussions through the impact of Gandhian Thought.



We also learned so much from all the ashram workers and students, big and small. In these days people are not able to get a good education even after expending great amounts of money. All of us truly feel that without any expense on our part we have been given the opportunity to learn so much. It was because of this course, and thanks to Lakshmi Ashram, that we had the chance to go to the Vipassana Meditation Centre in Dehradun and participate in the ten day meditation course, whereby we came to know our inner selves and observe the ever present agitation within our minds. All of us feel that the amount of honour and respect that Lakshmi Ashram has given us, we could never have received anywhere else. In these days the ordinary person is lost in the crowd and receives no respect at all from society.

Lakshmi Ashram also provided us with the opportunity to go for one month to Wardha in Maharashtra. All of us were so happy that we would have the opportunity to travel so far. We undertook the entire journey feeling incredibly happy. Half of us had never before had the chance to make such a long journey, and for us it was the first time that we had seen and travelled by train. How much we enjoyed this, seeing the names of the various stations that we passed through. As we crossed through Uttar Pradesh and entered Madhya Pradesh, we must have passed through nearly a dozen tunnels when it would turn really dark. We enjoyed the views from the window, sometimes passing through fine forest. The luxuriant wheat waving gently in the breeze was indeed a really beautiful sight. During the journey we had a lot of personal luggage, so we decided together to share the responsibility of looking after it. Eventually after hours spent enjoying looking out of the train window we eventually reached our destination, Wardha in Maharashtra.

How different it felt when we got out there – in Lakshmi Ashram it was so cold while there it was really hot. For the whole month that we were there in the Institute of Gandhian Studies we were able to observe, learn and come to understand a lot. We took part in classes and just as in Lakshmi Ashram we also spun, worked in the fields and helped in keeping the campus clean and tidy. We were so pleased to find that the individual and practical work that had been part of our Sadhana programme in Kausani was also present there, and we joined wholeheartedly in all the activities. We vowed before God and within ourselves that we would succeed in whatever activities we found ourselves involved in there. There were five young men from various states, along with one young woman from Jhansi who were enrolled on the Diploma course there. We became very close to all of them, enjoying very much helping them in all the work as brothers and sisters.

In the classes there we studied in depth the subject of Satyagraha<sup>1</sup> and learned about Gandhi's concepts and practice of *Nai Talim* or Basic Education. We also enjoyed seeing all the places of interest in and around Wardha, especially those associated with Gandhi's life

In finishing we can all truly say that we learned so much in this course and had opportunities to do so many practical activities as well. The course also gave some of us the opportunity to travel a long way for the very first time.

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<sup>1</sup> Satyagraha – the force which is born of truth and love or non-violence – passive resistance.